The GOLDEN BOOK ENCYCLOPEDIA

Aa

The letter A began as the picture of the head of an ox, ox. The makers of the first alphabets borrowed the picture from the Egyptian writing called hieroglyphs.

By a 1000 B.C., the alphabet was well known. It was written in the same way as the old ox head, but it was turned on its side. The Greeks, when the alphabet came to them, changed the letter so that it was itself like the capital A of today, A.

A has several sounds. It has a different sound in each of these words: ate, all, cat, care, arm, and sofa.

Five letters are vowels (vowel) sounds. A is one of them.

AARDVARK (ARD vark) The aardvark is an African animal. Its name was made from two Dutch words meaning "earth" and "pig." Its name says "earth pig." It's a good name for this animal. An aardvark spends its days curled up in a hole in the ground, and its body is shaped much like a pig's. But it does not stay in the ground at night, and in many ways, as the picture shows, it does not look like a pig.

Aardvarks live chiefly on termites. An aardvark can rip open a termite nest easily with its strong claws. It can lick up the termites fast with its long, sticky tongue. It may eat a hundred thousand at one meal. Aardvarks also eat ants.

African natives kill aardvarks to eat. But these "earth pigs" are not easy to catch. Although they look clumsy, they can run fast. They can burrow themselves in the ground fast, too. But they do not always run or hide when they are in danger. An aardvark may stand up on its hind legs like a kangaroo and fight.

ABACUS (AB a kus) The Chinese boy in the picture is counting with an abacus. His abacus has wooden beads that can be moved up and down on wires. On the wire farthest to the right, each bead below the crosspiece stands for 1. Each bead above it stands for 5. On the second wire each bead below the crosspiece stands for 10, and each bead above it for 50. On the

third wire the beads stand for hundreds, on the fourth for thousands, and so on. As the boy uses a bead in counting, he moves it toward the crosspiece. The top abacus shows the beads set for 1,234.

An abacus can be used to add, subtract, multiply, and divide as well as count. A skilled person can solve problems fast.

Abacuses have been used for several thousand years. In the Western world they are seldom seen today. But they are still a very important means of calculating in China, the Near East, and the Orient.

ARMY An army is a body of fighting men trained and equipped to fight on land. There have been armies ever since there have been nations. The pictures show some [illegible] soldiers of the past.

In the earliest armies all the soldiers were foot soldiers. They used swords, spears, and bows and arrows. But some 4000 years ago some [illegible] had horses and war chariots. In time almost every army had its cavalry—soldiers on horseback.

The invention of gunpowder made guns possible. Soon there were big guns that had to [illegible] one place to be pulled by horses or mules. Now horses and mules have given way to [illegible] trucks. [illegible] planes. There are [illegible] weapons, too.

Helicopters and airplanes carry soldiers quickly from place to place. They also work closely with ground forces in actual fighting. [illegible] may help too. Today land, air, and sea forces often work closely together. Among the new weapons are rockets and missiles.

Some armies of modern times have been huge. During World War II the U.S. Army alone had several million soldiers. It seems strange that in 1066 William the Conqueror conquered England with only [illegible]. (See U.S. ARMED FORCES; WEAPONS.)